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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the current status of Asian Americans in the U.S. schools from perspectives of textbook content and teaching methods. The author points out that findings of a survey of the 1950s and early 1960s textbooks reveal limited inclusion of references to anything Asian. This lack of interest can be seen, also, in American society, as represented by current difficulties of assimilating Vietnamese refugees into schools and community life. In terms of schools, there are some positive developments: little overt discrimination, bilingual instruction, and increasing recognition of cultural differences in general. Negative points include continued omission of Asian references in texts and curriculum; continued ethnocentrism and evaluation by Western standards; need for teacher education to include Asians; and overemphasis on blacks and Spanish-speaking groups to the exclusion of other minorities. The urgency of integrating multicultural studies into the elementary curriculum is confirmed by research showing that children's attitudes toward other nations and peoples stabilize by grade 8. Ideas are offered for developing multicultural curricula. (Author/AV)

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Honolulu: July 12,

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Asian Americans: Now

In approaching the question of how Asian-Americans are now faring in the mainland U.S. schools situation, we need to keep in mind a number of factors that have affected educational philosophy and practice during the past three decades.

1. the technological revolution - A-V aids, Xerox-type copying, jet transportation, television, satellites.

2. international interaction - increased due to military and tourist travel, conferences such as this one, interchange of professional and other publications.

3. side effects of the Civil Rights and Third World movements - changes in U. S. immigration laws, especially removing the restrictions of 1924 against Asian immigration; the spate of equal opportunity laws; pouring of Federal money, beginning in the 1960's, into the schools for curriculum development, including the insertion of Asia into the curriculum; rise of ethnic studies courses in colleges complete with conflicting cries for integration and separatism.

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4. better teacher education than in the earlier period on the whole, but with exceptions such as the mass hirings in the 1960's . . . , reduction in specific degree requirements . . . , and the question of the quality of current education majors . . . .

5. greater public awareness of the function of the self-concept with respect to learning, attitudes, and the individual's role in society.

6. post-war events:

   a. long-term change in public attitude toward the Japanese - some guilt feelings over internement camps

b. change in Chinese political situation and resulting confused attitudes toward both Chinas

c. change in attitude of Asians toward U. S. = dependence of South Korea, debacle in Viet Nam, ousting of Air Force from Thailand . . . considerable natural resentment of the "have nots" toward the "haves"

d. ignorance of the public on the mainland vis-a-vis Asians continues in stereotyped and unrealistic views, in part because of . . .

Textbooks and Currriculum.

1. Our own survey of the 1950's and early 1960's texts reveals very limited inclusion of references to anything Asian or about Asia.

a. repeated editions were unchanging - readers were rural/white

b. American Council on Education in 1946 - found a disproportionate stress on China, negative references to Japan (immediate postwar period), omissions and errors of fact.

c. such limited references as were found by others and ourselves tend to focus on events in American military history - Spanish-American War after which we governed the Philippines; World War II - Japan as aggressor, the Philippines as battlefield; Korea- UN police action; Viet Nam - war and partition. So much for Asian history in the textbooks!

d. Trager and Yarrow (1952) noted that in primers and pre-primers, "An Oriental person is often in 'native' costume and with a 'pig-tail.' Unless the story is exotic or about far-away places the Oriental is rarely present, and when he is, he has the role of the ubiquitous laundryman."[1]

1. Trager, H. G., and Yarrow, M. R. They Learn What They Live. New York: Harper, 1952, pp. 358-359.

e. readers persisted in presenting family situations that were stereotyped and blandly happy through the 1960's, and even today - rarely with an Asian in sight.

2. Criteria for textbook selection - followed on above findings

a. Vary according to state or locality, but all are checking for omissions, errors of fact, distortions, and also positive mentions of Asians and other minority groups.

b. In trying to evaluate texts for the table in the handout, we looked at the frequency and quality of mention of Asians and Asian-Americans; frequency of including them in illustrations in the text; sensitivity to the particular problems of Asian-Americans in both the melting pot and cultural pluralism situations. Some examples may serve to clarify our thinking:

GOOD - The story "Best Friend"[2] is the tale of a Chinese-American girl who moves from San Francisco's Chinatown to an "All-American" community on the peninsula south of that city. In the teacher's edition, the teacher is urged to ask the class: "What do you think about Judy's adjustment to the new community, to a new name (Judy), and to living in a predominantly non-Chinese community for the first time?" The idea of retaining pride in her ancestry is expressed more than once in the story . . . .

MERE MENTION - in a few readers, there are examples of Haiku Poetry without any elaboration on the form or its source.

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2. Kings and Things, Harper & Row, gr. 5.

OMITTED or UNACCEPTABLE - in another Haper & Row reader, From Pilots to Plastics (1969 and 1974, gr. 7), we have the "sin of omission". A timeline is given of important world events that listed India's independence in 1948 and a liberal government takeover in Bolivia in 1952, but omitted the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, certainly an event at least equal in importance to the other two.

A recent study in Baltimore, published this year, examined currently used basal readers and found that they ". . . perpetuate ethnocentric bias in favor of white culture, values, and standards. Such biases alienate minority children from textbooks and education, discourage pride in their own heritage and culture, and conversely, encourage assimilation into the dominant culture."[3] This statement reflects one of our major concerns - in what ways can the Asian-American child maintain self-respect and ethnic identity in a society that largely ignores him?

In the case of social studies texts, the California Task Force in 1971 found that none of the 15 basic texts or 45 supplemental texts and teachers' editions they examined was in compliance with the California State Code on content regarding minority groups. For example, let me share some of their comments on social studies texts published in this decade:

a. a 1970 text - "Very little (and that, negative) on Asians in America.

b. a 1970 text - "Little on Asia; what is included jumps from 3rd century B.C. to 1912 A.D."

c. a 1971 text - "No mention of Japanese-Americans, treatment of Chinese on two pages not well done."

In our own survey, summarized on the handout, we looked for Asians in illustrations and found very few. We checked for mention of Asians in the

3. "Sexism and recism in popular basal readers, 1964-76." New York: Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators, 1976, p. 5.

scattered scarce references to immigrant history, and found very few - except as noted in the Allyn and Bacon and Holt Databank series. We read tales of building the railroad in the West and too often found the role of the Chinese omitted. On the positive side, the Allyn and Bacon series includes parallel timelines in most of its social studies texts - one for Western civilization and one for Eastern civilization, with the two strains woven together wherever appropriate. Immigrant history, including the Asians, is specifically treated at the third grade level and again in the seventh grade text.

1. Just before coming over here, we received a copy of "Asia in American textbooks; a survey of 306 social studies texts used in elementary and secondary schools. The outstanding criticism they make is that Asian life, culture, values, and so on, are all viewed through Western eyes. This corroborates our findings.

The Holt Databank System includes immigrant history, illustrations depicting a variety of peoples in everyday pursuits as well as culture-related activities - including Asian-Americans. The supporting teachers' guides suggest techniques of incorporating holidays or special events of different cultural groups into the curriculum, and making intergroup understanding a reality. Since the teacher has considerable latitude when it comes to using these supplementary activities, it is imperative that the teacher have the sensitivity and knowledge to implement them.

Concerned with teachers as we are, we looked at 19 methods texts used in teacher education courses. These are also summarized on the handout. In several of them, we found no mention of immigrants or immigrant history, the melting pot idea, or cultural pluralism. In others, multi-ethnic references were to blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans - not Asians, even in the reading methods

texts. One methods text author, who shall remain nameless, finds little interest in Asian-Americans in the great immigration period or even today. He wrote, in a review, "Now if the groups to be examined in the elementary school textbooks . . . concerned the Afro-American, the Spanish American and/or the American aborigine (which groups are presently highly visible) the interest market might be wider." If the author of a teacher education text feels this about one of the "less popular" minority groups, why should we expect teachers to feel differently? Teachers model themselves after teachers they have had.

This lack of interest, however, in Asians and Asian-Americans appears to pervade mainland American society. Dr. Albert Yee recently wrote: "Perceptions of the majority groups toward Asian Americans have been a peculiar blend of naive simplicity, a dualism of favorability/unfavorability, and vicarious stereotypes. American perceptions of Chinese and Japanese have flip-flopped back and forth over time, mainly because the basic image has been a superficial one, and has been perpetuated by inadequate information and prejudice."[4]

As the Viet Nam war ended, initial American reaction was to provide for the thousands of refugees. Once in the States, however, there arose public questions of why Americans had to care for them. They were so "different," so unadaptable to American ways. Housed in Army camps, those who were not soon sponsored by American families faced a conflict - to return to their devastated and Communized homeland or to face possible rejection in American communities. This possible rejection contrasts sharply with the reception accorded Hungarian refugees in 1956, most of the Cuban refugees in the 1960's, and other Westerners. Part of the rejection stems from ignorance, some from prejudice, some from the perceived dificulties of assimilating the VietNamese into the schools and other aspects of community life.

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4. Yee, Albert H. "Asian Americans in educational research." Educational Researcher, 1976, 5 (2) pp. 7-8.

Public interest, and consequently public funds, seem to focus on those groups who demonstrate the most and are the noisiest. This has not been a typical behavior for Asians on the mainland. An exception has occurred in San Francisco's Chinatown where the parents opposed busing of their children and sued to have their children taught in Chinese until they were competent to learn subject matter content in English. In a report of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, referred to in the reading list you have, it was pointed out that "Language minority children in this country have had to attend schools which ignore their language and culture. School is another reminder of the discrimination and limited opportunities facing these children as members of minority groups." (p. 138) Furthermore, the Commission stated, "Unlike earlier non-English speaking children in this country, these children face an increasingly technical, skills-oriented society. There has been a shift in jobs from manual labor to skilled occupations." (p. 14)

The language situation has been especially critical for newly-arriving Asian children. With the repeal of restrictive immigration laws in 1965, over 50 percent of the school-aged Asian children in 1973 were foreign born, with little or no English-speaking skills. What the Chinese parents sought, in the Lau v. Nichols suit ". . . was an educational program that, given adequate motivation, they could make effective use of. They did not seek to eliminate the risk that students might not make effective use of the schools." (p. 265) Subject matter instruction in the native language, concurrent with learning English language skills, was ordered by the Supreme Court in February 1974 . . . .

Certainly instruction in Chinese, or Japanese, Tagalog, or whatever, for the non-English-speaking child will help him to feel more comfortable in the school. He would gain in feelings of self-esteem also if there were

some positive references to Asians in the curriculum and reading materials. A number of surveys of children's literature indicate the scarcity of books with which Asian youth can identify. The problems of Asian immigrants now and in the past are simply not a subject for commercial children's books - at least in the eyes of publishers, evidently. Further, there is little recognition given of any of the Asians who have contributed to American society. Yet Hawaii has sent 4 Asians to the U. S. Congress - Rep. Patsy Mink, Rep. Spark Matsunaga, Sen. Daniel Inouye, and Sen. Hiram Fong. The President of San Francisco State College is Dr. S. I. Hayakawa, of Japanese ancestry. He is best called to mind for his stand in the face of rioting students, but is recognized and respected by his colleagues as a scholar, and is now a candidate for the U. S. Senate in California. Dr. Albert Yee, quoted earlier, is Dean of the Graduate School at California State University at Long Beach. In the arts we have had Lin Yutang - author; Dong Kingman - artist; I. M. Pei - architect; concert musicians and symphony conductors, a few stage and screen stars; many scientists including Nobel Prize winners, and occasionally leaders in local and state public offices.

In Summary, the picture of Asian-Americans in today's schools is better than the one described by Dr. Isser, but not as good as the one we would like to see.

1. On the positive side - little overt discrimination, bilingual instruction, increasing recognition of cultural differences in general.

2. On the negative side - continued sins of commission (though fewer) and omission in texts and curriculum (inadequate attention where it exists); continued ethnocentrism and evaluation by Western standards; a need for teacher education (pre- and in-service) to include Asians; an over-emphasis on blacks and Spanish-speaking groups to the exclusion of other minorities.

At the American Educational Research Assoc. meeting in San Francisco in April, Barrows and Jungeblut reported that a recent cross-sectional study of American schoolchildren's attitudes toward other nations and peoples showed that these attitudes tend to stabilize by grade 8. This underscores the urgency of integrating multicultural studies, including Asian-Americans, into the curriculum in the elementary, not the secondary, school years. It is to this problem that Dr. Isser and I now turn.

Thank you.

Schwartz/Isser

Asian-Americans: Tomorrow

Ideas to convey in dialogue:

1. "melting pot" v. "salad bowl" or "mosaic" v. ethnic separatism
2. Hansen's law
3. examples of integrating a curriculum
4. course in ethnic studies (by any title) for pre- and in-service teachers:
   a. immigrant history - general and for specific groups
   b. resources - research and people - use of Asians, not Western observers
   c. increase teacher sensitivity to different groups
5. need to recognize changing problems of Asian communities on the mainland since 1965. There is greater sensitivity in California than on the East Coast, although even California practice cannot match that of Hawaii.

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1. The common ground enables all of the students to function in American society, to share in pride at the nation's achievements and to work together on her problems. We strongly advocate bilingual and multicultural education, not for ethnic separatism, but to give each child the asset in this interdependent world of speaking two languages, of taking pride in his/her own heritage, and to have respect for the heritage of others. We are beginning to see third generation youths attempt to revitalize their heritage and have a strong interest in ethnicity.
2. Curriculum - reading - stories by Asians about Asian experiences, native land as well as in America.

   soc. st.- immigrant history needs more stress, attention to geography-largely neglected, inclusion and appreciation of Asian culture through its history.

   science - biol. - common devel. patterns of all men; ecology - use examples of Asian adaptation to climate and envirmental conditions; physics - include Asian scientists and their contributions.

   art & music - an appreciation of diff. in form etc.